

## Community Engagement and Participatory Decisionmaking

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## What is Community Engagement?

- Buzz word
- Community consultation – often a requirement for government and agencies
- “A hoop to pass through”, “Ticking the box”
- Building social capital and individual responsibility

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- Developing structures of participatory democracy beyond representative institutions that aimed to benefit and empower the whole community, rather than one section at the expense of another. (Meadowcroft 2001)
- Enabling local people to develop their own solutions to local problems (Andrews and Turner 2006)

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## Models of local democracy

(Andrews and Turner 2006)

- Consumerist engagement
- Participatory engagement
- Stakeholder engagement
- Citizen centred democracy
- Radical democracy

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## Consumerist Engagement

- Focuses on communication with ‘customers’ about services in order to bring about improvements/increase responsiveness
- ‘Customers’ can choose whether or not to use services
- More often used to rubber stamp, for example levels of service provision

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## Participatory engagement

- Focus on capacity building
- Can be very successful and help communities to ‘reduce inequalities in the distribution of power’ (Stoker, 1998)
- Requires extra resources and ongoing attention
- Danger of being hijacked by powerful groups or fizzling out.

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## Citizen centred democracy

- Citizen governance
- Partnerships
- Public interest at the foundation of political decisionmaking
- Bottom up structures of participation and sharing of power with elected councils
- Increasing social capital

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## Stakeholder democracy

- “Viewing the public as stakeholders fragments citizenship and communities making them too susceptible to managerial rather than political treatment” (Andrews and Turner 2006 p385)
- Tendency to individual interests and not collective good.

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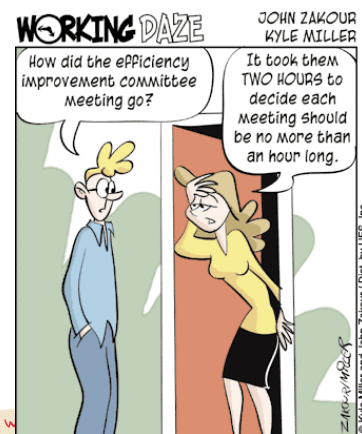


## Radical democracy

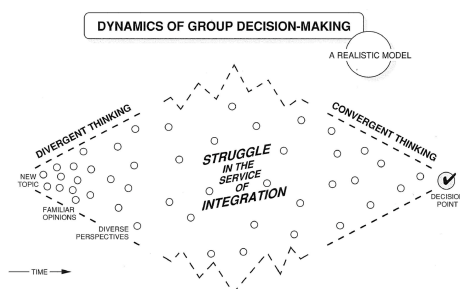
- Danger that “agonistic” engagement can polarise communities “between rival factions” or cause disengagement through endless disputes.
- Participatory processes which deliver solutions for all, not just greatest collective power.

Andrews and Turner (2006)

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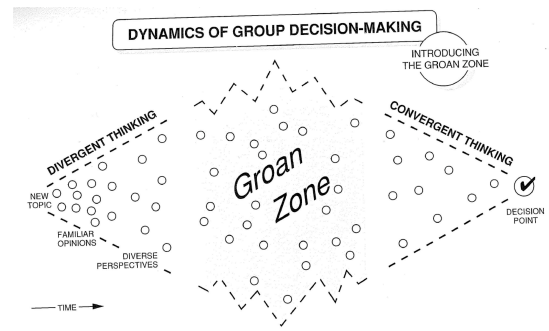
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A period of confusion and frustration is a natural part of group decision-making. Once a group crosses the line from aligning familiar opinions to exploring diverse perspectives, group members have to struggle in order to integrate new and different ways of thinking with their own.

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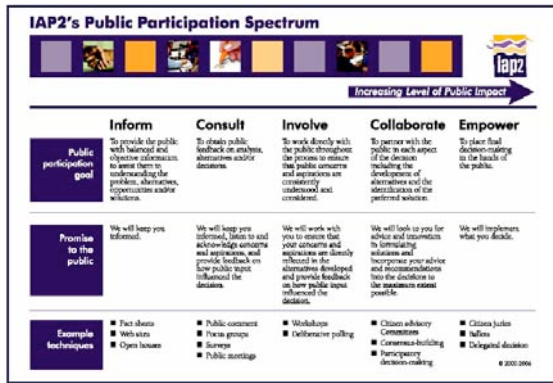


Struggling to understand a wide range of foreign or opposing ideas is not a pleasant experience. Group members can be repetitious, insensitive, defensive, short-tempered – and more! At such times most people don't have the slightest notion of what's happening. Sometimes the mere act of acknowledging the existence of the Groan Zone can be a significant step for a group to take.

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[http://www.iap2.org.au/resources/list/asset\\_id/36/cid/1/parent/0/t/resources/title/IAP2%20Spectrum](http://www.iap2.org.au/resources/list/asset_id/36/cid/1/parent/0/t/resources/title/IAP2%20Spectrum)

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## A few musts in participatory engagement!

- Good Planning – use logic models/stakeholder analysis
- Practice Active listening
- Openness to unexpected outcomes
- Opposing viewpoints allowed to co-exist
- Equal opportunity to speak
- Agreements – may not be cut and dried
- Ongoing Evaluation

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## Take Aways!

- Process should fit the purpose
- Purpose should not be confined to fit the process
- Don't raise unrealistic expectations thru lack of planning
- A participatory project may consist of several different processes
- Many ways not one
- Flexibility and ongoing evaluation vital

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